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SUBJECT: WHAT IS EU IDENTITY IN UZBEKISTAN?

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMB JON R. PURNELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The French Embassy, current EU chair in Tashkent, has started a campaign to inform Uzbek students about the EU. However, at a round-table discussion, EU diplomats failed to convey a concept of EU identity that satisfied their audience. The Uzbek students attending the roundtable, who appeared largely uninformed about the EU, generally repeated what has become the standard rhetoric on the importance of Russia in Uzbek foreign relations. End summary.

¶2. (C) Approximately 50 university-age students filled the French Culture Center to capacity to discuss EU identity. Members of the official panel included diplomats from Britain, Germany, Poland, France, Latvia and Turkey. Throughout the evening, the panelists failed to relay a concept of EU identity that satisfied the young people. A number of confused students repeatedly asked for clarification, but the diplomats simply repeated their personal notions of identity, including geography, art, democracy, religion and language. One male student asked how religion played an identifying factor in light of EU opposition (sic) to Turkey's accession. The panel avoided answering the question. (Note: The Turkish diplomat had specifically requested before the meeting that Turkey's EU accession bid not be discussed. End note).

¶3. (C) Poloff asked the audience if they thought an EU-type structure possible for Central Asia. The students were skeptical. Some said the region lacks a common, practical goal, such as recovering from a world war, to encourage regional cooperation. Other students said regional presidents are too selfish and hold too different opinions to work towards a customs or political union. Two female students mentioned Russia's importance in Uzbekistan's foreign relations. They said that, apart from a few members of the Uzbek elite with ties to the U.S., Uzbeks and Russians share a similar non-European, Soviet past and therefore only Russia can help Uzbekistan challenge the economic, political and security threats of the U.S. and China.8

¶4. (C) Comment: The students were very curious to know what European identity is, but were frustrated by the EU's inability to define it to their satisfaction. Uzbekistan's recent accession to EurAsEC is widely-reported in the Uzbek and Russian press. However, the students did not mention the organization, and even failed to respond when the Turkish diplomat chided them for this lapse. End comment.

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